

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INFORMANT: LARRY FLYNN  
CONDUCTED BY: MICHAEL BELL & DOUG DENATALE**

**M = MICHAEL**

**D = DOUG**

**L = LARRY**

**LFP MB-ROO1-R002**

M: No, I just, usually I just put in a little signature. Something like today is November 2. I'm talking with Larry Flynn and this is Michael Bell and Doug DeNatale.

L: Well do whatever you want.

D: You don't even play it back to see if it's working?

L: I hope you're going to ask questions.

M: Where do you want to, Do you want to start with the Highlands, or with the Cambodian Community?

L: Well, you can start with the Cambodian Community, because I don't know that much about the history of the Highlands. I don't, I've never dealt with the history of any part of the city. It's just with the ethnic community that's why, with just, where ever they happen to be landing, you know. Just the ethnic community, that's all I deal with.

M: Well, you know enough about the project now to know the kinds of things we're interested in. In particular I thought you could focus on beliefs. Especially medical beliefs, health beliefs. health related beliefs and practices. And how those are withstanding acculturation, if at all. Some of the problems involved and some of the practices that are still done, and some of those that aren't.

L: Okay. There's, well there's a lot of things. Ah, they're still using Chinese medicine in this, in the city. Ah, they get it in Chinatown in Boston, they get the medicine. They have a lot of things. For instance they have something called Tiger Balm. We have the same thing. We call

it Vicks Vapor Rub. It's a mentholated base. And ah, they rub it on their lips and they put it under their nose whenever they have a fever. Everything is a fever. Ah, if they have a headache it's called a fever. And they rub this under their nose and they breathe in the fumes. Just like we do to Vicks Vapor Rub. And there's other sorts of things similar to that. But we have it here too. Little small jars that they pick up in Chinatown. Ah, they're getting away from it though. They've found out that western medicine is better. There are, there's one person in the Cambodian Community, he's a Monk out to the Temple and his name is John Masse. And he's been prescribing a lot of this Chinese ah, herb medicine and that sort of thing for people, which is a dangerous thing to do, because he's treating a lot of people who have psychosomatic problems. Guilt feelings about what went on and what is going on in their lives now. And we've had, you know, a couple of suicides, and several suicide attempts. They cannot be treated by these herbs that they're, they're passing out. We've got a Vietnamese doctor in the city. Ah, and he's prescribing a lot of this stuff.

M: A medical doctor?

L: He's, well he says it's his medical doctor. I don't know if he is, or not. It's a Dr. Nguyen, and I'm not too sure if he has a degree from this country or not. But from all I know is he's the Vietnamese Doctor and a lot of people like him. Ah, because he does understand a lot of their things, a lot of their problems are mental problems. They're not physical. They have aches and pains in certain parts of their body, but it's, it's mostly like I said, psychosomatic. And if you talk to them and soothe them, and you know, calm them down, the pains disappear. Ah, they went through so much over there in the Cambodian Holocaust. They brought it back with them. Even though they don't have outward physical scars, they have a lot of pain inside. They've developed things like stomachaches, and headaches and things of, you know, for no reason at all.

M: You think that's more a reaction to what they left behind than it is having to adjust?

L: It's half of it, but one of the biggest problems in the community probably is the guilt feelings. Ah, they don't have guilt feelings because of where they are. They have guilt feelings about why they're here. Ah, why are they still alive when their friend who was a better man, or a smarter man, why was he killed and why did they survive? They don't realize that because physically they are tougher than their friend. And this preys on their mind. In fact we have one man who did hang himself in the city. And that was his problem. Why did he survive and his friends not survive. And that preyed on him a lot. So finally he just hung himself.

M: Are they having suicide problems with ah, teenage girls, adolescents?

L: We've had girls who have attempted suicide. And I think (--)

M: Because of arranged marriages and so on, or is that not, it maybe not a big factor here?

L: No, that's, no that's not the problem with the arranged marriages. Ah, they seem to go into that very well. The problem has been I think conflict of cultures. Because they see American girls who are very free, and they're not. The girls are kept home, and they're kept very tightly controlled. And ah, but still they're expected to obey their parents and go along with the old

ways. And then they get to this country and see the new ways. And they see the girls that have the freedom, and have the ability to go out on dates and go to dances, and that sort of thing. Ah, the Cambodian parents have not yet allowed their children for instance, to go to the high school prom. We've had a couple of cases of people who have gone to the prom. And so two years running they've had Cambodian Prom at the same time they've had the one at the high school. And it's just been the kids from Lowell High School, the Cambodian kids, and they have run a regular dance at the Girls Club for them. The parents don't understand this prom business. And ah, a couple of people have gone to the prom, and no problems. Ah, they've just gone and danced, and got dressed up like everyone else, and they went right straight home afterwards. They didn't go down to the beach and spend the night. But see, they don't date. Ah, so that is a problem. You cannot go ask a girl to go to the prom with you. It's just, just an impossibility. The girls that Cambodian guys are going with ah, they don't want to be taking these girls, some of the American girls that they're with, you don't take those girls to a prom. Ah, you take them out in the back seat of your car. Ah, but the really good girls in the American communities have not yet felt free enough to date the Cambodian guys. I think possibly it's because of their parents.

M: Is the family structure still pretty strong?

L: Oh it's, it's tight, very tight. Ah, the oldest person in the family is the boss. And he doesn't have to be an old person either. And there's cases of guys who are twenty-four years old who are the head of their family. The oldest male is the boss. No matter how old he is. And in some cases the mother is still alive and still in the house. But the son is the boss.

M: Have the younger generation started to learn English more than say the older generation?

L: Oh, yeah.

M: And is that causing (--)

L: It's very difficult for somebody, you know

M: An inversion of power? And the young people are the ones that mediate the culture?

L: No it's got nothing to do with that. I think it transcends all people. People who are young have the ability to learn quicker. And it's the same thing in the Cambodian, you know, the older people just don't have the ability to learn the language. Ah, the young kids are picking it up very fast. Ah, they're, a lot of it is slang expressions.

M: Right. But doesn't that give them more power in the family in the sense, because they understand the surrounding culture, so they can deal with it better.

L: It's not a question of power.

M: No.

L: You know they don't think of it as power. More of a convenience than anything else, because they can help their mother or father. And you'll have kids who will go on appointments at hospitals and things like that, and bring the kids with them to do the interpreting for them. But it's not a question of power. The elder parent still is the one, if you want to use the word power, the parent is still the one with the power.

D: Has there been any changing perception of that ah, with the longer time the families spend here?

L: Oh, yeah.

D: I'm wondering where the teenagers fit in? What kind of a change?

L: It's changing. Ah, they're getting more Americanized. Ah, they've been cases of you know, kids openly defying their parents. Ah, and ah, the parents don't understand this. The culture in their country was, the parent is the boss. You live in my house, you obey my rules, which is basically the American way anyway. Ah, but they fight this. And ah, they fight the parents trying to fix them up on some of the marriages. I know we went to an engagement party where neither the girl nor the boy wanted to become engaged. And they mutually agreed among themselves that they would not go through with the marriage. She wanted to go to school and continue her education, so did he. And they both agreed amongst themselves, no way are we going to go through the marriage, and they split up.

D: You handed us that question earlier because that was causing a lot of problems in Providence with the young girl.

L: Yeah, they're getting more Americanized.

D: Being betrothed to an older man in his thirties or forties, and not you know, she being assimilated enough to not, to realize there are other options available to her. And not [rest of comment unclear]

L: Well, one of the weddings that you just photographed, Mrs. Chung's daughter, ah, her husband now, that's her husband, but he asked her to go out American style, ah, for quite a while. And she refused to go out with him American style. She said, "I want to do it the Cambodian way." So he went along with her, and finally did ask her to marry him, and did go through with it. You've got photographs of the wedding and everything. But she refused to go out American style. So there was a case where ah, her parents were not going to stop her from doing it, but that was her decision. Ah, she wanted to go through the whole routine ah, Cambodian style. And she did. And I saw them this week, and they were both giggling and happy. They've been married a month, and you know they're like a couple of little kids with each other. So they are happy with each other. Then on the other hand I was at the Temple one day, and sitting with a boy who was a senior in high school, but he was twenty-three years of age. And he said it ah, when we were talking and I said well, "what do you plan to do, go to school or get married?" He said, "I'd like to get married." And I said, "well, found a girl yet?" And he pointed at one of the girls there. He said, "I like her." I told him, I said, "Sam, go for it American style." And he did. And they

went out on dates. And when she graduated from school they got married. Now, they're, they're both in school and ah, they're married and they're happy. But he went for it American style. And that's a couple who really liked each other, the American way. So it's happening. Ten years from now I don't think you're going to see too many Cambodian marriages arranged. Too many changes are taking place.

M: Can I, I'd like to get back to medicine if we could?

L: Go ahead.

M: Is there, is there much self treatment in families? Home remedies?

L: Oh yeah.

M: Grandmothers doing things on [unclear]? What sorts of things do they do?

L: Yeah, in a, in a lot of cases, a lot of cases, the Monk is doing it, at the Temple. Sao Khon is doing it. Ah, he will take them out there, and they have a ceremony where they pray over them. And then they rinse them with water to wash the problems away. If a couple is having problems amongst themselves, he will do a ceremony to wash away all their troubles so they get along. And if they have a sore leg, or a sore arm ah, they feel like um, if there's prayers, and blessings done, the pains will go away. Ah, [unclear].

M: What kinds of distinctions are you aware of in, in the medicine. Like we distinguish between, like you would talk about psychosomatic, (L: Yeah) or mental affliction, as opposed to something physical that's opposed to say a virus, or a cold that's not an injury, or an accident. What kind of distinctions do you, are you aware of that they make?

L: Well, they all feel that most of their problems are inside. You know, if they can't see it. Ah, like I said, they call everything a fever. Ah, if you ask them what's wrong with them, and they'll say, "I have a fever." And I put my hand on their face, or the foreheads and I don't feel any rise in temperature. You know, they don't, obviously there's no physical fever there. It's just their word for anything that's bothering them. And ah, I really don't know, you know, how to put it, you know, because most of the problems are in their minds in a lot of cases, because they've been through so much. And ah, they're always thinking, constantly about what happened. It keeps coming back all the time. Ah, and most of them has these horror stories that they'll tell yeah. And that's on their minds constantly, day and night. And ah, they don't understand like I said, why they got here. Why they were the ones that are alive. Ah, why they weren't killed. It's and ah, it bothers them constantly. And that's not just the older people. It bothers the younger ones too. I'm talking when I say younger, I'm talking kids in their twenties. Because those are the kids that were taken from their parents and thrown into indoctrination camps over there under the Communists. And they managed to get out and escape. But it's on their minds too. Um, a good Cambodian Psychiatrist is needed badly, and we don't have one.

M: You said there were medical doctors? Western medical?

L: Yeah, we've got two that I know of. We've got Dr. Nguyen and we have a Dr. Tran up on Merrimack Street. And he is more western. Ah, from what I understand he's ah, he has a Degree. And he is a medical doctor. And ah, he does a lot of talking to them. The ah, most of the treatment they give them is sitting down talking. And that's what we used to call "The Bedside Manner". And they'll sit down and they'll talk, and talk, and talk. Most of these people need to talk. They've got to get it out of their system. And they've got to talk to somebody about it. And generally what they do is they'll talk, and talk, and talk, and then they'll prescribe some medicine, which is usually harmless. And then that will make, right then and there, they'll feel better by taking this, these placebos.

M: Is there any attempt on the part of the doctors to combine the old and the new?

L: Not really. Because most of the time we try to get them to regular doctors. We set up appointments with western doctors. [Unclear] we, I don't know of anybody who's referring them to the Vietnamese Doctors. Ah, anything that we find out in the community ah, we send them to American Doctors.

M: So Vietnamese Doctors are basically practicing with Chinese medicine, or ?

L: A combination of western and eastern medicine, you know, and at the same time um, like I said we get them to the ah, the hospitals here. The hospitals have all got clinics. And ah, we steer them. All the agencies are steering them to the hospitals, and to recognized clinics. And we have Cambodians in most of them. So that they can translate and make sure that the doctor understands what's going on.

M: Are the people hesitant, or reluctant to go to a western type practitioners?

L: No. No they've accepted. Ah, because we've had cases where people have been treated by ah, the Chinese type medicine. And then by getting to a regular doctor we find out it didn't do any good. They realize that the western medicine is better. (M: more effective. Oh yeah, yeah. Ah you go to the clinic now and you'll see them lined up waiting to get in there.

M: So there's not a religious ah (--)

L: No there's nothing rel, religious about it. The religious part is mostly for things that it's on their mind. And the Monk takes care of that. Ah, but western medicine has been accepted. You've got to remember that their country was occupied by the French for thirty years. So they're used to western medicine. The French did not encourage ah, this Chinese type medicine. They encourage the western type medicine. And so anybody who lived in Phnom Penh or Battambang is quite familiar with western type medicine, and believes in it. There is really no prevalence of ah, Chinese practitioners in the city. Like I said, there's one Monk out to the Temple who is an American and believes in it, has done some prescribing, which is a dangerous practice, because he really is not qualified to do it.

M: Are there ah, a number of Christian Cambodians? Do they have their own church [unclear]?

L: Ah, [chuckles] it all depends upon the moment. Ah, I caution some of the Protestant people who are converting so called Cambodians to Christian religion. Ah, they go to the Presbyterian Church in the morning, and in the afternoon they go back to the Temple. Ah, they have tried to convert them, but not completely. Ah, they will go to the services mostly because these churches have helped them in the past, and they feel like they owe them. But basically they're Buddhist and they'll never change.

M: Well, the Temple sounds more encumbrancing than what we think of as the church in our society.

L: It's a community center more than anything. It's a social gathering. You know, Doug's been there and it's you know, it's sit down, and even when the Monk is praying there sitting talking to each other. It's a, it's a get together more than anything else. Ah, if you want, you feel lonely during the day you can go out to the Temple and talk to somebody. We were out there one afternoon and a family just dropped in. It gives them somebody to talk to. And they don't have to go out there and talk. They can just go out and sit there if they want. Ah, help, you know sit there, and if somebody comes in to talk, fine. It's, it's a club. Ah, they call it a Temple, but to me it's more of a social thing.

M: Are there ah, some people that you think would be on the top of the list whom you could talk to?

L: In what area?

M: Ah

L: In medicine?

M: Well, medicine, religion, family life? Just Folklife in general too. (L: Well) I don't know what's been done in terms of say art, arts and crafts, or that's going to be another area.

D: Well, George Chigas did a survey of Cambodian ah, crafts for the Historic Commission, although I'm sure that there's a lot more out there.

L: I've talked to people in the community about it, you know. They don't think of arts as we do. The ability for somebody to sit down and you know ah, say make a bracelet out of bamboo. They don't consider it an art. You know that's something they've always done. (M: Right, that's typical of course) Ah, somebody to sit down and embroider a pillowcase that's used at the Temple. You've seen them out there. That's not an art. That's just something that they do. Ah, we always take arts and separate it from life. They don't. They put like this, arts and crafts are part of, you know, normal things that you do. And that's the way it was in this country years ago. Women sat down and did sewing and embroidery and things, and that's just part of life, every day life.

M: I'd say the majority of the people that I would call Folk Artists or Folk Crafts people fit into that category. The first response usually is, "well why, why are you interested in me? I'm not

anything special."

L: Well, I think, both, mostly it's an American type thing. Where we've made a big deal out of artsy-craftsy people. Ah, where these people have just accepted it as part of their lives. And they don't think it's any big deal to sit down and pick up a needle and do embroidery or, or carve a piece of wood. They sit there while they're talking and you know, whittle out a little figure. Ah, they don't, they don't make a big deal out of it. I think if you did a survey, you know, of American people you'd probably find out that it's part of their normal life. They do crafts of one kind or another. And it's the same way with the Cambodian Community. I know with the Portuguese Community there's, one of the big things is the Portuguese embroidery. It's going on all the time. But they don't think anything of it. They just sit and do it. This ah, cut work that's done in Madeira, it's done here all the time. They sit down with a needle and thread at night and just do their thing. But it's just something to keep their hands busy. You've run into them. The little old guy on Lawrence Street that makes his wine. That's just part of life. It's not a craft to him. He's always done it. And ah, I think you'll find the same thing with the Cambodian Community. Cause George had an awful time trying to find people that could do things. Ah, he found a Monk who could do some wood carving. Mrs. Hang who did some embroidery. And he found some man, with a little coaching who could make the Cambodian kites. But other than that, I don't think he found too much.

M: Why not? If it's so common?

L: Well most of the talented people in Cambodia were killed. You know, anybody who did not do physical work was killed. Ah, anybody who did any reading, studying, anybody who wore glasses. Anybody who did not have calluses on their hand was automatically killed. Ah, their best singers, their best dancers, their best musicians were all killed. When you start wiping out that whole population, you get down to people who just don't do things other than go out and, you know, grow rice and try to survive.

M: So there's not, there aren't too many singers, musicians, dancers, this ah, [few words unclear] recreate now.

L: Well, we're starting to encourage those we have here. Ah, the Khmer Dance Troupe that's in Washington now, ah, they were found in the camp. They escaped. But also in the Refugee Camps they were taught dancing. And we have a Dance Troupe here in Lowell. And those are people who learned the dancing in the camps. Ah, they did not learn it in Cambodia. The people learned it in the camp, in Cambodia, those people are in their forties and fifties now. Ah, they didn't survive, ah, the Holocausts. It's a learned thing that was passed on. Ah, a few old people have, remember the dances, remember the music. I haven't seen a sheet of Cambodian music since they arrived in the city. They'll sit down and they'll hold a jam session just like American musicians do. And they'll go over the music. Somebody has it in the back of their mind. And they know how the tune is. Ah, there are recordings in the city. There's a lot of recordings of Cambodian music. Ah, and you'll go buy them and they'll say, "well this is a real old song." Which means that precedes Pol Pot, you know and the Communist Regime. But there's an awful lot of new Cambodian music that's being created now. Especially in this country.

M: How about stories apart from say personal experience stories from their experiences at camps and so on, but traditional stories?

L: Very few.

M: It's just not?

L: They're mostly ghost stories. They're firm believers in ghosts. Ah, they don't like, like the ashes of somebody who's died, they don't like them in the house. Ah, they like them in the Temple, because the persons ghost will be in your house. But they don't understand an American who lives alone in an apartment, because of the ghosts. And there's this, they'll tell you stories about certain parts of the jungle they would not walk in because there were ghosts seen in there. Ah, they love ghosts. Ghosts under their bed. Ghosts in the closet. Ghosts in dark rooms.

M: Did they have ways to protect themselves? To ward off ghosts, and so on?

L: Yeah, it's called extended family. Fill up the apartment. That way you're never alone with a ghost.

M: Oh.

L: That's why you'll never see a Cambodian live alone. They always have a lot of people around. And they don't understand an American living alone. And ah, a couple of times my wife has gone off and I've stayed home, you know, for a weekend. And they look, they have a look of panic on their face, you know, you're not afraid to live alone? Spend two days?

M: [Few words unclear] ah, young married couples? What (--)

L: Well, they're still (--)

M: Do they, do they stay within the family, or do they go out on their own?

L: Yeah. Yeah, you know the wedding, the wedding that you went to, Mrs. Chung's daughter, she moved in with him. And he's living in his grandmother's house. There's the grandmother, two uncles, and the newlyweds. Now they'll stay there. Um, financially it's a better arrangement for them, because they just, they split up the cost of the rent. They split up the cost of the food. Ah, some of the couples now are going off on their own. Ah, and they've told me, "we're going to live American Style. We're going to get our own place." And I know of a couple of couples who have done that already. Ah, they're living alone with nobody in their apartments. Ah, they're getting there. They're getting Americanized.

D: That must put those couples in an interesting position in regard to the whole community. I mean are they viewed as being strange?

L: No. No, there in a transition period right now, between the old ways and the new ways. Ah,

years from now, you're not going to see the extended family in Lowell, in this country. They're going to go strictly the American way. And they're all going to get their own houses. Ah, this is like I said, the transition period, from the old to the new. And they're grabbing on to the new very fast. As fast as they can do it. They're going out and buying American style furniture for their houses, which is something completely alien to them. Ah, their houses, as you know are quite bare. There's no couches in their living rooms, and chairs and so forth. You'll start seeing them as time goes on. A couple of people have asked me you know, where can I buy American style furniture. And I'll send them to a couple of stores in the city that I know can fit their financial ah, status. I'm not going to send them to the most expensive store. But I'll send them to places where they sell three rooms of furniture for \$500.00, you know, so they can fill the whole apartment for \$500.00. And ah, we've given couches, and other people have given couches and chairs to them. And they've, they've come to use them and accept them. Learn how to get up off the floor and sit on a chair like Americans.

M: It sounds like during this whole process of assimilating, some things are relatively easy to adopt new ways and old ways, some are relatively easy to give up, but some, some aren't.

L: Well, all of them are going to take time. You know, this (--)

M: What are the most, what do you think are the most tenacious aspects of the old culture? What are the most strongest ones?

L: The strongest is the parent trying to guide their children's entire life. Everything. Trying to dictate the whole thing. Cause the younger people now, they look at the American kids and they see that they, like I said, they go out on dates. They can go out to movies, they can go here, they can go there. Wherever they want to go. They have relative freedom. Where the Cambodians don't. They're still answering to their parent. The parents plan their whole lives for them. They tell them, "you're going to go to school and after you go to school you're going to go, you're going to go to college. Or you're going to get married and you're going to marry this one." Gradually one by one those things are going to be whittled away. And then the kids are going to start making their own decisions. But that's going to be the toughest thing. Ah, they're, the, for instance the way we live in compared to the way they live. That's changing already. Um, the food we eat.

M: Yeah food, I was going to ask you about food.

L: Yeah, there's cases now where young Cambodian kids have refused to eat Cambodian food. They don't like it. And they eat American food constantly. Ah, they're just, they were born in this country. And they've never eaten a lot of Cambodian food. And they want to eat everything that everyone else is eating. And they go to the schools. And they have lunch with their friends. Well, they're not going to carry a bowl of rice to school. They're going to carry peanut butter sandwiches like the rest of the American kids. And they're already doing it. As you, as you know they've gone on to the American cloths, real fast.

M: Oh, sure.

L: Yeah, you don't see young kids wearing the Sarongs. You see the older kids wearing them. Ah, mostly the girls. They're still wearing them. But, ah, the young kids forget it. They've said you know, "wearing those things is queer."

M: [Laughs].

L: [Laughs] which is a word they picked up from Americans. But gradually, ten years from now, like I was telling Doug, they've got to come back and take another look at this Asian Community. And they're not going to recognize it. It's going to be completely different.

M: Probably in another generation or two young, the young, the young ones will be wanting to go back to the old people to find out what it was like.

L: Well, they plan to do that now. They plan to teach ah, the language and the customs at the Temple to them. That's why that they bought the building next to the Temple.

D: Where does that, where does that impulse come from? To, does that come from, is there a generation in the community?

L: The people who are the M.A.A. are headed at that direction. You know, because there are young kids whose Khmer is terrible. Excuse me, that they just don't speak it well. And so they want to conduct classes in their language and their culture. Ah, and their talking about dancing, teaching dancing. The music, ah, those things are all going to be lost if they don't start teaching it.

M: When you say the people in the M.A.A. here (--)

L: The Board of Directors.

M: Is it a Cambodian person?

L: They're Cambodians themselves. There's no Americans pushing to do this. Um, the Americans if they're doing anything they're pushing them to mainstream into society. But when they do do something like this, or they have a dance troupe, or they have an orchestra uh, they're being encouraged to bring it out into the public. You know, at festivals and that sort of thing. To show it to everybody else. To keep it going, because it's not a demand, nobody could make a living being in a Cambodian dance troupe in Lowell. But they encourage them to keep it going. And ah, practice and pass the dances on to others. Because the dancers don't stay that long. Once a girl gets married she's not interested in dancing anymore with the Troupe. So they have to bring in another girl, a younger girl. And they only last three or four years in the dance troupe. Our lead dancer, who danced back in 1984, she got married last year. She doesn't dance anymore. So they have to find other girls who take their place.

M: Who makes the costumes?

L: The women make them themselves. They ah, we've still got a lot of women who do sewing.

Ah, and some of the costumes aren't even sewn together. It's a case of wrapping more than anything else. They just get a piece of material, fold it and pleat it, and ah, but remember how the costumes looked. They remember how the costumes looked in the villages. They're, they're not familiar with the costumes like the Troupe in Washington wears, because they never saw those. They never got invited to the Palace. That dan, that dance troupe, that's completely alien to them. And they were very surprised when we (--)

TAPE 1 SIDE 1 ENDS

M: Um, about the, the, the, the promotion of cultural activities. Where, where, do you know where the impulse for that was back in the camps? I mean, the, you know how did the whole thing about you know, teaching people dances, something like that. Where did that come from?

L: It's, it started in the camps because of boredom. They had nothing else to do. They had no jobs. It was just a question of hanging around. So they would sit around, and the few musicians they had would start playing. And then somebody said, well I know how to do the dances, and they would start teaching. It was not a formal thing, like you know, auditioning people and trying them out for music ah, as a musician or dancers. It was more or less a sporadic thing, you know. Somebody said, "Oh, I'd like to try it." You know and they practiced in the camp. And then they came to Lowell and ah, we encouraged them to continue it. Back in 1984 we had a festival at City Hall. And we went to the Cambodians and said, we want you to perform at the city festival. Panic set in, but they did perform. And it was a riot. Ah, people had never seen it before. They were very surprised. And the city was just amazed that ah, they did it so professionally. Ah, but they practiced long hard hours to do it, because this was their first appearance at City Hall. The Cambodian New Year is another time we insisted they do it at City Hall. And they do one dance there as part of the Cambodian New Year celebration at City Hall. And we've encouraged them to participate in all the festivals. Ah, to share their culture with the city. And when, that takes a lot of talking to get them to do it. But once they do it, they're happy about it. They're happy with the results. And they're surprised Americans are that pleased to see it. And that's with all the groups coming in.

M: When they celebrate their own festivals do they encourage, or invite outsiders?

L: Oh, they're open. Since the first year we did the New Year Celebration. One year they had it, and they had it and it was a very private thing, a very small thing. And that was in 1983. In 1984 ah, I talked them into doing the flag raising at City Hall. And ah, I told them I wanted the flags, I wanted the National Anthem, I wanted the dancers, the Buddha, the Monks, everything. And ah, the city said, whatever they want they can have. And they were turned over the whole plaza. And they brought, they set up an altar. The Monks were there praying. We had the flag raising. We had the National Anthems. Ah, the whole thing, few Americans were there that year. Mostly people who were in the Bilingual Program in the city, who had dealings with the Cambodians. The second year there was more people. Third year there was more. I don't know as time goes on it's going to be a, probably a 50/50 thing between the Cambodians. They all invite, if they have American friends, they invite their American friend to come down. And they

invite their American friends at the night time celebration too. We have a dance and a show, and raffles and so forth at night. And they encouraged all their friends to come. They, any Cambodian affair is open to everybody. Anybody can go. Same as the Temple. Anybody is welcome. Ah, they do not exclude the population of going. In fact when they do go, an American does go to one of these affairs ah, they go out of their way to make them feel at home. It's always been that way. From the, as long as I've been involved in the community.

M: Um, let me get back to the question that you asked earlier about ah, people that you think I should, that should be on the top of the list, to get some insight into traditional culture.

L: Traditional Culture? Ah, Sao Khon, Venerable Sao Khon the Monk.

M: Okay. Now you, did you? [Michael is asking Doug.]

L: He hasn't interviewed Sao Khon.

M: You haven't? You met him though?

L: Oh, he's met him.

D: We haven't formally interviewed him, although ah, George Chigas did an interview with him and made a copy of it.

L: Oh yeah. (M: Yeah) Um, Narin Sao, who is the first Cambodian appointed to a position in City Hall. Former President of the community.

M: What's his name?

L: Narin Sao.

M: And he works here in this building?

L: Yeah, he works in the Department of Employment Security. And the first Cambodian businessman in the city, who has a business. And that would be Narong Hul. And he owns the Liberty Video on Appleton Street. He was the first President of the Cambodian M.A.A. And he should be one to talk to. He can give you a lot of information on the early days back when we had only a couple of hundred families. Back in 1983.

M: He's also the person who keeps the video tapes that are made at the Temple.

L: In the Archives.

M: He's the Archivist for the Committee.

D: Oh, okay.

L: Yeah, he's the first Cambodian we worked with in the city. Try to get them more organized. The second one is in California. He's [Soume?] Sok. He's in California now, but he was the president. And he wanted to formally put the Cambodian M.A.A. together. And when he went on vacation he sent the papers to the State House, and had it done. In fact I've got, I've got ah, copies of the first papers we sent to the State House. My name's on it [laughs]. I'm surprised. Fifty years from now somebody will pick it up and say, "who is this guy Flynn? What a strange Cambodian name that is." But those are the key people to see. There are other people, but you're going to get a lot of bull from them. But those, those people and they can hedge you to other people. Um, like Van Lee, Van Lee is one of the Elders. Andrew Chea would be another one. He was, Andrew Chea was the first Cambodian to come into Lowell.

D: Andrew Chea, is he any connection with, who is it? Hang Van Chea?

L: No, that's not Hang's relative. His son, Andrew's son Daniel works at the School Department here in Lowell. But his was the first family to come to Lowell. Way back, but those are, those are key people and ah, without a doubt.

M: What about, what about, what about this whole area of domestic needle work and stuff like that? Is that still and active ongoing thing today?

L: There are a few people who still do it. Ah, Hang Van Chea's mother is the one who does all the pillowcases at the Temple. She's one of the people. Ah, you've seen those pillowcases. And she does that work. Ah, I have, other than her I haven't seen anybody else that does it, because I looked. Because I do needle work myself. And I've gone to school in West Townsend to Elsa William's Needle Work School. And I've been looking for it. And whenever I see it I pick it apart to see how they do it. So I have not seen a lot of it around.

M: So they're not really retailing too much in terms of traditional crafts around here? Making things and selling?

L: Most of the things we've, ah, around here are things that have come in from Thailand. The stores are full of things from Thailand. The blouses they wear come from Thailand. The Sarongs come from Thailand. And it's all machine embroidered ah, embroidery. And all the material that you see at the weddings and so forth, it's heavily inlaid with gold and so forth, and gold threads. That's all machine made.

M: Ah, You do see material that looks, that looks like Pondow that's from, is it the Laotian? That comes from the camps, is that right?

L: Most of, like I said they buy everything here in Lowell right now. Ah, they don't send to the camps for it. All of the stores carry the Sarongs. They all carry the blouses that the women wear. And those are nothing but embroidered blouses, almost like a lace blouse. That's all machine done. It's not done by hand.

M: When you say the stores, what communities are you referring to?

L: Oh, you can buy it at any of the stores that are, The Lee Jewelry Store has a whole selection. Battambang, Phnom Penh you'll find some of them. I bought an embroidered shirt at ah, Joe's South East Asian.

M: These are the stores that do carry?

L: Yeah, they carry food, but then they carry other things as well. What they really need, and I've talked to some of the people in the community, there's a need for a Cambodian department store. A lot of their things they still go in to Boston to Chinatown to buy. They buy pots and pans in, they go all the way to Chinatown to buy them instead of buying them here. They don't particularly care for the style of American pots and pans. They want the same style they've always used in Cambodia. And they can get them in Chinatown. The bowls, the dishes they use, they buy them all in Chinatown. We have bowls, we have American type bowls. But you don't see them using it. You see them using the Oriental style bowls. And you buy those in Chinatown. The spoons, the chopsticks, you know, that's all from Chinatown. Ah, stuff is readily available. It's just that it's not located here in Lowell. They just don't have that much of it. If there's somebody in their community starts a department store (--)

M: I'm surprised that some enterprising person hasn't.

L: Well, Narong is, is talking about putting in a department store as part of his video store over here. And he's got a few things over there now, and he's starting to have more. But ah, it's still basically a video store. But he carries the video tapes, and he carries Laos tape recordings in Laotian, uh, Laotian and Cambodian. Uh, because that's, so he's carrying their music.

M: Mostly popular, what we would call popular music?

L: It's, a lot of it's new music but, he still has some that he can tell you if it's the old music or not. Some of the people are still recording the old music. Ah, and it's done primarily in California. And some in Rhode Island too. A lot of it comes up from Rhode Island, because they have recording studios down there. And I had a, I bought a tape and it came from Rhode Island. But, I haven't seen in, I think that they really are not into sitting down and doing a lot of handy craft things. Um, whether it's because they don't have the time, or the inclination, or the space. I don't know what it is. But I've never gone into a house and seen anybody doing any knitting or sewing, that sort of thing. But they do have sewing machines in the community. And they do, they make dresses for parties and so forth. But it's basically an American style dress that they're making. They'll go to George's Textile and he does a great business with the Asian Community. And that's where they buy it. That's right near the Acre too. So it's handy. But they buy all of this lame and glittery material for special parties. And they buy it from George's. And silks too, because he has some Chinese Silk. And they will take it home to that little sewing machine and whip it up. And half of the time they don't even have a pattern. They just cut it and put it together. But s far as handy crafts, I really don't see it.

M: Can I get you to back up and talk about your own involvement with the community? How that started in the first place, and maybe go back even a little bit before that with your volunteer activities and involvements?

L: How about twenty years? [laughter]

M: That sounds fine with me if you have the time.

L: All right. I started here in Lowell, I came to Lowell in 1960. I got out of the service and I came to Lowell. And I worked for a company called Commodore Foods. And, they had a problem hiring people. As we do today. Back in the, around sixty-five the influx of Portuguese started into Lowell. That's when a Kennedy lifted the quotas on immigration, and then it was first come first serve as far as getting into the country. So I started hiring Portuguese girls. And I would call the Director of the International Institute at that time. That was Deolinda Mello. And I would ask her to send help to me. And I built a crew up to about 50% Portuguese in that company. And this company manufactured frozen fish sticks, which is kind of funny that it was the largest private packaging of frozen fishery products in the country. You name a brand, they did it here in Lowell. Big brands like Carnation, S.S. Pierce. Names that were known all over the country. But they were all done here in Lowell. And it required a lot of help, because it was all packaged by hand. So I called her one day for some help. And she said, "I'm having a meeting tonight." She said, "I've done you a lot of favors. Why don't you come to the meeting?" So I went to the meeting. What I didn't know is that she was planning a Folk Festival. She stood me up and introduced me and said, "this is Mr. Flynn. And he's going to do the Irish part of the Folk Festival." [laugh] I sat down and I, to the people behind me, and they laughed and they said, "she got you." And I have been at it ever since. [laugh] I stayed, I went on the Board at the Institute, and in 1976 I went on as President of the Board of Directors of the Institute. At that time on the Board I had people like Mayor Ellen Sampson, um, the first woman Mayor of Lowell. Mr. Pellegrino who was the founder of Prince Macaroni, Mr. Antonopoulos the founder of Anton's Cleaners. And I was a nervous wreck, because I looked over there and everybody down there was a name person in Lowell. And ah, I went through the whole meeting and when it was over Mr. Antonopoulos said, "You did good." So I got over my nervousness from there on in. And this went on. We ah, started running ethnic balls every year. We did it for seven years. This was a black tie, dress up affair with ethnic buffet. And it had five hundred people. We did it every year. And the minute we announced it the tickets sold out. People would reserve whole tables. It was probably the most elegant affair we've ever had in Lowell. A lot of people do formal affairs in Lowell now. But this was done at the Christian Formation Center, and it was an absolute sell out every year. All we would do was in the paper we'd announce the day we were going to do it, and it would sell out. That money went to the Institute. At that time I was invited to a meeting of the Regatta Committee here in Lowell. And the Regatta Committee was trying to work towards the renovation of Lowell, and bring in the National Park. And they asked me as President of the Board of Directors to come and work with the ethnic groups. So I took over as chairman of the ethnic part of the Regatta Committee. And that was eleven years ago and I'm still doing it. And that was working with all of the groups. Right now we're working with about twenty-five different groups in the city. And we've done at least two festivals every year. Multi-ethnic type festivals. We used to do them in a large tent up on Pawtucket Boulevard. And then in addition to that for five years we did ethnic festivals every Saturday afternoon as part of the National Park. And we did that at Lucy Larcom. We've done over 110 festivals in the past 10 to 12 years. I've also worked as Advisor on the Grecian Festival, which we do every other year. And also worked with the Polish Solidarity Committee

to raise money to send to Poland. That was you know, thousands of perogies one day. We made \$15,000. We sent it over with Cardinal Medeiros to give to the Pope, and he passed it on to Poland to buy ah, medicine. But I think, done total, as near as I can figure out 140 different ethnic type things over the years. At the last count. Ah, in the transition about 1983 I ran into the first Cambodian I ever met, which was Narong Hul. And I learned of the Cambodian and Laos and Vietnamese coming into the city. And I started acting as advisor to the Cambodian and Laotian. And 1984 we put the Cambodian M.A.A. together and ah, some paper work into the State House and formed the organization. And it was about twenty board members ah, two Americans, the rest were Cambodians. One, the other, the other member was American, was Lydia [McTeague?], the Director of the International Institute. Ah, and I was on their board until this past June. And I was advisor to the Buddhist Temple and the Laotian American Association too, in that period. Ah, and then in June 1st I took over here at Gateways. And that's a rough twenty years [laugh].

M: What were your um (--) As the, as the Cambodians first entered the city what were your perceptions of ah, what they were facing here?

L: Other than the language barrier, I didn't see any reason why they shouldn't fit in, because I've worked with all the ethnic groups. And I told the Cambodians at that time, in 1984, that there are no new problems. I said, "The problems that you're going to be facing were faced by the Portuguese twenty years ago, and they were faced by the Irish." But then I pointed out to them when the Irish came over people wouldn't even hire them. And I told them about the discrimination against the Irish many years ago. Where they said, "No Irish Need Apply." They didn't believe me, [M: chuckles] ah, because they figured the Irish had always been here, and we owned the city. And that was, that was told to me several times, that the Irish own the city. [Laugh] We don't own it. [laughs] Ah, the problem is basically language. They were very gentle people. They were not out to start any problems. We've had other groups that have come in and made a lot of noise, and started problems, and start demanding their rights. They were very laid back. They didn't know that they had basic rights, which all American citizens have. And I'd try to encourage them to you know, to make a little noise and ask for a few of these rights. And ah, now they're, some of them are getting very vocal and their speaking up, and they've learned that they have the same right as every American citizen, even though their not an American citizens. So they've uh, they're heading in the right direction. Um, majority of them. They're not all good people. There are some bad people in the community. But the most part they are an asset to the city. We know who isn't. We know the politics that are going on in that community. Raising money for political causes in Cambodia.

M: Can you describe some of them?

L: Basically there's two. We have the followers of ah, the son of King [Seeanok?]. They're raising money to send to the Prince. He's made two visits to the city. Both times I'm sure he's left with quite a bit of money. Um, the money is being sent back to camps in Thailand, to buy guns, to buy Communists. The other party is a democratic party. That's [Son San's?] Party. And their raising money in the city to send back to [Son San?] to buy guns to fight whoever, Communists, or the Prince. Um, the ah, Prince's people in the city have been very militant. Gone to the Cambodian people and said, "you don't give us money, when the Prince takes over

you will not be allowed to come back to Cambodia." Ah, they've tried to coheres money out of a lot of people. Some of the people said, "I don't give a dam. I'm not going back to Cambodia anyway."

M: You know that, that brings up a good question. Are there many people here, Cambodian who had at least in the back of their mind that they're going to go back eventually, or?

L: A few of the old people hope that they can go back. Ah, the young people, I'm talking young, now I'm talking people in their twenties and thirties, say that they'd like to go back to visit. Um, the real young kids in their teens, they have no interest in it. They don't remember Cambodia. Ah, one of the older people in the community is Mr. Van Lee. And this past year he's decided he's going to learn English. I think in the past he's had it in the back of his mind that he might go back to Cambodia. But then about a year ago he decided that he was going to learn English. So I think he's made up his mind that ah, he must be spending the rest of his life in this country. He's grandchildren speak perfect English. They don't, they don't speak Cambodian. They're going, his grandchildren are American. They're born in this country. And I think that he realizes that this is the place for him to live. I think a lot of the old people in their mind would like to go back. A lot of the old people still have family over there, where the young kids don't.

M: Do they send money back to the relatives?

L: All the time, yeah.

M: Do they believe in American banks?

L: Some of them do. Ah, they believe in American money. Ah, I had a meeting with Mike Desmarais who's Vice President of the Arlington Trust, about encouraging to put money in the banks. And they've gone so far as to put Cambodian people working in the banks. In fact, up in Hosford Square the Lowell Institution for Savings, they have Cambodian people working there. Um, they like the banks that look like banks. Ah, the Arlington Trust Bank, one of my conversations with Mike Desmarais, ah, he sent people down to the bank to look it over, and they wanted to see the bank. And the bank on Woods Street is all plate glass. They did not think that that was a good place to keep their money, because people could break the windows too easily. The Union National Bank, which is in downtown Lowell, to them is a bank. It's a big strong stone building with a heavy bronze door. That to them looks like a bank. Ah, but there's a lot of money out there. Probably you're talking a million, a million and a half dollars in pillow money in the community. Ah, when it comes time to buying a house they have to go open up accounts to, and put their money in. But ah, you can go to ah, any house, they've got loads of money. They carry around a lot more money than you or I.

M: Their transactions probably tend to be more cash than ours. [Unclear] credit cards.

L: Yeah. They don't like paying interest on anything. Even when they bought the temple they we're, they took a thirty year loan out, ah, and they've been there two years now. And ah, they were going to pay off the whole Temple this year. They borrowed, the whole price of the building was \$280,000. And they were going to pay it off this year, and they decided instead of

paying it off they would buy the building next door. And they paid \$115,000 cash for the building next door. So they really don't, they don't like paying interest. And the car dealers in Lowell will tell you they've done an awful lot of transactions with people plunking down \$14,000 on the table. Because they sit down and figure out what that interest is going to cost them. And it's not worth it. But they don't have, they don't have plastic money. They don't believe in it. Because it costs too much to have plastic money.

M: What about how people go about buying something like a car. How is that done?

L: If they have the money, the total cash price for a new car, they will buy it. If they don't, they will borrow money from their friends. And no papers are signed. It's all done on trust. They'll do the same thing when they want to buy a house. If they don't have the full price of a down payment. They will borrow from friends, or family. And no paper is signed. It's all done on trust. And they've bought some pretty expensive buildings in the city of Lowell. And a lot of it has been borrowed money. They will pay the people back. And they don't set up any terms. They don't say, I'll give you fifty dollars a month until it's paid up. There's nothing like that. They just know. The first personal loans are money that they will pay back first. And then in the order in which they got the money. And that's a debt that they know they have to pay. And they will, they will honor that.

M: Are things purchased individually, or communally, and how does that work out?

L: It all depends on the family. Ah, a lot of people are buying their own cars. The young guys are buying their own cars. That's the big expense in the community. The young guys are out buying cars for themselves. The families are pooling their money until they get one car. As long as they have one car per extended family they're all right. That gets them to the store to buy their food every week. It gets them down to Providence when there's a party going on down in Providence, or Hartford. It gets them to visit. On a weekend that's the big entertainment in the Cambodian community. It's visiting. I think about half the population is in motion on Saturday and Sunday. And they go from house to house and visit their friends. That's their big recreation. It's visiting. Ah, because they work all week and they don't see their friends. And they want to keep in touch with them. And so they, they always are visiting. And you go to a house and people are dropping in all the time. And while they drop in they're feeding you. [laugh] They always have the rice and the meat, and whatever is available. But they, everywhere in the city they're visiting. And you get out on a Saturday in Lowell and stand on a corner, all you see is cars going by with Asians in them, traveling. They love to ride. And they think nothing of getting into the car and driving to Providence to go to their Cambodian restaurant down there for supper. When the, when Providence has that New Years celebration, I think half the Lowell Community goes down to Providence. (M: It's not that far) And conversely when we have our celebration here in Lowell we have them up, coming up from Providence.

M: What about televisions? Is that um (--)

L: They have all brand new colored TV's. They have VCR's. They have the best sound equipment going.

M: Is my impression right, that that tends to be one unit per household? I [unclear].

L: What do you mean, one television?

M: Yeah, [unclear].

L: Yeah, they don't put them in every bedroom. It's in the central room. You don't see them in the bedroom. You see them in the central room. Generally if there's a large kitchen that they all hang, sit around, that's where the TV set is. You've seen it yourself. Ah, they have a TV with a VCR up there. And the big business from Thursday through Sunday is renting videos.

M: I guess Narong does a lot of that business, huh?

L: He says he's got about 5,000 customers. And he has every Ninja, Karate, Judo movie that's ever been made. Every Cambodian movie he can get his hands on. Laotian movies, Chinese movies, Indian movies, even though they don't speak the language they still like to watch the Chinese movies and the Indian movies, because it's very close to their culture. Ah, they don't understand some of these Indian movies and they'll play them over and over again. And he's got quite a selection over there. You've got to get over there to see it. [laugh]

M: What about the head of the ah, does it work out, is it head of household, or head of family?

L: Same thing.

M: Is it always the same thing?

L: Same thing.

M: What if you had, you can't have all, well take a situation with the, Mrs. Chung's daughter. Does she then become part of that household, and that of, part of that family?

L: Part of her husband's family. Her husband's family.

M: And is the family always encompassed by the, by the apartment? What happens when you have like different branches of the family? Different(--)

L: Generally it's the oldest person, male figure in the house. Like I said, even if the oldest male figure is twenty-four years of age, he is the oldest male person there. Ah, you saw it at the wedding. Chin's daughter got married. Her brother, who was not that much older than her, took the father's place. He is the oldest male member of that family in this city. He has a brother in Australia, but as long as he is in this city he's the head of the family. Ah, if his brother from Australia came and lived in Lowell, his brother would automatically take over. It's just, there's no question about it. The oldest male member always. Even though there are women who are older than them. It's always the man.

M: What kinds of decisions are they responsible for? Whole direction of the family and

everybody in it?

L: Yeah. Ah, keeping the family together. Helping them out. Ah, mostly money situations. Making sure that the family has enough food. The rent's paid. Ah, things like buying a car. They sit down and decide on opening up family businesses, but it's all done by a family. Ah, that and everybody who's living in that apartment is a family. And they'll sit down and they'll discuss it. And they'll say okay. You have \$5,000, I have \$5,000, here's \$5,000 we all put it together and we do this with it. Ah, they're very tight on their family. And anybody can be part of their family if they take them in. There's been a lot of adoptions in the city of people who are not related to them. But they just include them as part of their family. They'll call them my son, or my daughter and their not blood relations at all.

M: I'll let this run out to the end here.

L: It's the story of your life.

D: I'll tell you, I've seen a lot of these things go buy.

L: Have you ever kept track of how many tapes you've filled up?

TAPE 1 SIDE 2 ENDS

LFP-MB-R003-SIDE A

D: How does that play against the whole cruising scene here in Lowell? What, what part did the Cambodians [few words unclear].

L: I think there's a few that are cruising, but they know they're not going to get any American girls to climb in their cars. So they're really not into it. The main reason for the cruising in downtown Lowell is to pick up girls. It's not to show off their cars. The Cambodians use their cars to get places. And going around in a circle in downtown Lowell is not their idea of getting someplace. Ah, they like to go places where their friends are, and show off their cars, but not in downtown Lowell. And they spend weekends working on their cars. Cleaning them, and shining them up, and fixing them up.

M: What are their favorite kinds of cars?

L: Trans Am.

M: Just like [unclear]. [laughs]

L: Trans am. Yeah, black Trans Ams. Second choice right now, the new choice is an Iroc-Z, and it's got to be red. No, that's the two big ones. You'd, like on Sunday you go down where they're playing soccer, down the South Common and it looks like a Trans-AM block. Nothing but black Trans Ams all over the place. And like you said, there's unclear ones too. Guess they have a New Years celebration out at Brown University, and that's all you see is black Trans Ams in the parking lot down there. Somewhere they figured out that that's the best car. And I kid them, I call it a Cambodian car. And they think that's funny.

M: There have been some cases of people's cars being torched and stuff like that.

L: Not too many in Lowell. No, there's been a few, but not torched. Generally they'll ah, Trans ams that have that eagle on the hood. But that's done with a decal and then people scratched it up. And they've scratched, or they've trashed a few windshields, but I don't know of any cars being torched. I know that in the Chelsea, Lynn, Revere area, that's happened quite a few times.

M: Any sense of who's doing it and why?

L: Well, I would imagine it's some of the Hispanic kids. You know I'm not going to say definitely, but I will say that there is a jealousy going on there. I know there's been ah, fights between the Hispanic and the Asians in the Acre section.

M: They're battling for the same turf, the same jobs, the same work.

L: Ah, I don't think it's a question of turf. I think it's a question of just plain old jealousy. They don't have these big cars. And they get jealous when they see these kids driving by in the Trans-Ams. I don't think it's the turf. Otherwise you know, you would have a whole section of nothing but Hispanics and another whole section of Cambodians. And they're mixed up very much down in the Acre. The Acre section is too small really to carve out into turf. It can happen in the bigger cities I think. But uh, I think it's mostly jealousy.

D: Well this sort of brings us to the recent state of things few words unclear interested comments that you may have. Your analysis of the situation.

L: Well, I, I called it in the New York Times and they did an interview with me. And I said, I called the man a bigot. And that's George Kouloheras.

D: Is he related specifically to few words unclear?

L: On, in the New York Times, and I've got a copy behind me. I called him a bigot. And that's just exactly what he is. Ah, his remark at the school committee was, "GD slanty eyes go back to the rice paddies." That to me is a bigoted remark. And if somebody had said that many years ago, George Kouloheras would have been setting on a mountain in Greece watching his goats. Ah, we both had no problems transition, minor problems going from the Irish to the Greek, the French, now into the Asians. And he's riled up the city. He's made this busing issue a case of the bigots and the anti-bigots. The busing issue has got to go through. We've got to have central enrollment. There's no question. If we don't have it, it automatically gets turned over to the

court, and that's it. The city is trying to do it themselves. I was in Boston last week at a Gateway meeting, and a Black man who works at city hall in the Gateway Program took a shot at me about the problems going on here in Lowell. And I said, "ask Mayor Flynn where he was twenty years ago." He was trying to stop busing in Boston twenty years ago. And I said, "at least Lowell is trying to take care of its problems. We're not going to wind up in the courts." I think the city is handling it as best they can. When you've got 32% minorities and you try to spread them out around the city. I think the city's got to do it, and they'll, they'll do it.

D: What's your reading of the ah, the parent, the parents' reaction to busing as opposed to politicians' reaction? Is the media blowing it out of proportion, or is, or is there in fact (--)

L: The media has always blown it out of proportion. Every time we've had an incident the media has come up from Boston and tried to blow it out of proportion. Good news doesn't sell, bad news does. We've had reporters who repeatedly talked about gang warfare. Every time we've had Cambodian punching a Cambodian, or robbing a Cambodian, they've talked gang warfare. They've always come up here and tried to make a big issue out of it. Ah, I don't get upset when one Cambodian robs another Cambodian, because we've got Americans robbing Americans all the time. Why make a big issue out of it. We've got 15,000 Asians in this city. One is going to rob another one sooner or later. That's just human nature. And we're not going to be able to stop it. Ah, we don't have gangs in the city, in the Asian community. And ah, I don't think we're going to have them. The thing is, the media has been in here, the publicity about Lowell has been phenomenal. A city that went from 14% unemployment to 3% in a little over ten years. They're jealous! That's what it boils down to. They've still got high unemployment in several areas of Massachusetts.

D: Well what about, I'm going to [L: go ahead] openly, openly play devil's advocate here. What about when you read in the paper, you read these comments of parents about the busing and all of that.

L: I think that somebody's got to do some PR work, tell the parents, "you don't have a choice". You've got to go along with Central Enrollment. And I think that parents who live in the upper income sections of town have got to realize that the minorities have got to have the same rights. I don't think that over all that the schools in the Acre section are as good as those in Belvidere. I think the schools in Belvidere probably get the best teachers, because it's a prestigious thing to work in the better schools, as opposed to the Roger School and the Bartlett.

M: It's also easier too I suppose, to work in a better school.

L: Well not only that. I think a lot of it is nepotism too. There's a lot of nepotism in a small city. And a lot of the teachers are related to people in the city. And they get the jobs in the better schools. But, there are some excellent teachers in some of the other schools. The Roger School, some of those teachers are incredible. God, they've had to deal with ah, the problem with the Asians, and Hispanic and Portuguese kids. And ah, they've handled it very well. In fact they're thrilled to have a mix in their class. And I heard on the, one of the teachers from the Daley School said that she was delighted that now that her classes are mixed up the way they're supposed to be, with 32% I think, 32% of the minorities in her classes. She's thrilled with that

mix now. Ah, I think a lot of it is going to ah, effect the blonde, blue eyed American kids. I think ten years down the road, I think the, what we call the American kid is going to have to fight like hell to keep up with the Asians in the school system, because their geared to education. I think they're really going to show up some of the American kids. And they might set the pace for some of the American kids who don't do their homework. They might feel like they have to work a little harder to keep up to them.

D: How do you think it's going to go tomorrow, Election Day?

L: I think the good people are going to win. Ah, at the primary the City Manager asked me at City Hall, he said, "what do you think?" And results of the Primary I said, "the bigots are taking over." And I said, "but we've got to reach the good people in the city." They're out there. We've got to reach them. And I think tomorrow, I think that Kouloheras is going to do all right. I think Tarsy Poulios is going to do all right. But I think we're going to have ah, at least five good people on the school committee. And I think the city council. The people who are ah, going along with this central enrollment are going to get in. And I think this city will start getting back together again. I don't think the bigots are going to make that much of a noise. And it's an interesting thing, we were talking, you mentioned Kouloheras, you brought his name up [laughs].

D: No, no. You brought his name up.

L: You did! Yeah, you started it.

D: No, no. You did.

L: You started it. [laughs] We're on tape. [laughs]

M: I just finished reading how he could survive punching [unclear].

L: Well one interesting thing is now George Kouloheras has been on the school committee for a long time, off and on. And at one time he was on the school committee and his grandchildren were not in public school system. They were in a Franco-American School and his grandson was in class with my daughter. So even as a member of the school committee he did not feel comfortable with his kids in the school, grandchildren in the school system. He had them in a private school. So that says something about the man [laugh]. You know, if he was that sure of the school system, he would have made sure that his grandchildren were in the school system. You got another question? I know you do.

D: I'm trying to think back, how to formulate it, ah, [pause]. Where do neighbors play into all of this with the school system? I mean is it still pretty much a neighborhood system? I mean do people look at it, is that what some of the parents' resistance (--)

L: Well, if you look at the, the area in Lowell. Lowell's not a big city. I mean you can drive from one end of Lowell to the other end in fifteen minutes. So you're not talking huge acreage. And the neighborhood school still is the concept the people would like. And I think that gradually the neighborhood, as time goes on will integrate itself. I see the Asians who will move

out of the Acre section. They'll move into the Highlands, and be going to school at the Highlands. You'll see them moving into Belvidere. I know some of them are in the, the ah, parts of Belvidere now. And I think you'll see more of it. As the Asians get more affluent. They're going to be giving up this idea of living in multiple family dwellings, and start looking at houses on their own American style. They'll be buying single family dwellings as they get more affluent. And that way their kids will automatically go right in to the neighborhood schools. Ah, it's always been traditional for the ethnics arriving in the city to settle on the Acre section of Lowell. And gradually they move out. Ah, the Irish lived there first. The Greeks displaced them. Later the Hispanics came in and displaced the Greeks. Now the Asians have come in and dispersed the Hispanics. And as they get used to moving and get more mobile and feel more comfortable in the better sections of the city, and are able to afford it, they'll integrate the schools themselves down the road. But I think right now we have to do it ourselves.

M: Is there ah, any red lining, or any other resistance by real estate, (L: no, in fact there's) or any communities to keep out certain

L: No, in fact a lot of the landlords would prefer to rent to Asians rather than Hispanics. They've, you know, specified when they call the agencies, that ah, "I have an apartment for rent. If you know of an Asian family that needs it, send them over."

M: Okay, well that's, that's (--)

L: It's red lining if it's, if to anything probably against the Hispanic Community. Yeah, I knew you were going to ask that.

D: Well, red lining or not, I mean that kind of preferential treatment for one group is red lining [unclear].

L: I think it's, it's not preferential. I think it's a matter of economy. If you've got a choice with an Asian family that's got a lot of money, and a Hispanic family that is on welfare, I think they're going to lean more to the Hispanic ah, to the, correction, to the Cambodian or Laos family. And also the Cambodian people keep to themselves. They're very quiet. Ah, you don't see an Asian walking down the street with a ghetto blaster on his shoulder. You don't have the loud parties. Ah, they're very quiet. Ah, you've been in rooms where there's been fifty people in the room, yet it was very quiet. Ah, they're not a loud people. And where the Hispanics, when they, you get fifty Hispanics in a room, you've got a lot of noise. And I think the landlords want to keep the neighborhood quiet. They'd rather have that. That way they don't get any complaints from the neighbors on either side.

D: [Comment unclear] Um, we have heard comments like ah, well we don't have, we don't have too many, too many Asians in this, this community, but it's not that we don't have any thing against them. It's that you know, when people you know, have a house or something that you know, they tend to look, look you know, for people within their own group to run into something like that. How big a factor is that here? I mean we've heard that specifically about, maybe about Centralville. In some of it, some parts.

L: Well, it, yeah because ah, most of the houses in Centralville are family type houses. Ah,

they're not multiples. If anything it's a two family house at the most. And a lot of times its part of their own family that's renting the other apartment. Ah, there are not a lot of multiples. Except in the lower part of Centralville. And Asians have bought the houses there, the multiples. I don't think that there is any deliberate attempt to only sell to certain people. Ah, I know when a house is for sale and it's a type of house that the Asian wants, their looking for specific types of houses. Their looking for multiple dwellings so they can get some income. But they've, they're smarter than we are. We buy single family houses. And we live in it. And we cut our own grass and all that. They're out after multiples. They want to make some money on their property. They just don't see the idea of just buying a house and getting no income. They want income property. Ah, they're a lot of Cambodian landlords in this city right now. When you consider they've only been here three or four years, they're doing very well. But they want that income. Um, that way they don't get problems from their landlords if they own the building too. And they'll, they'll fill it up with their friends. They will call ah, their friend in Providence, or California and say, "I just bought a house. I have an empty apartment." And the next thing you know the family has moved into Lowell into that apartment. But I don't think it's a deliberate attempt to keep anybody out of a section of the city. I think if you went around the city you would find Asians in every section of the City of Lowell.

M: So you see that as effective. Asians making active choices on their own about the [unclear].

L: Oh yeah, nobody stops them. Ah, my daughter, the house she's living in is on Gardner Avenue over by the University. And ah, the house was up for sale. And one of the first people that came over there to look at the house ah, she knew the Cambodian Realtor that was showing the house. And he brought a Cambodian family. And he almost dropped when he saw her in the house. He didn't know it was her house that she was selling. Ah, it's a family type thing. And she's living there. Ah, but she was very surprised. But it's a house that is already, has two apartments with a possible third on the third floor. So that's what they were looking for. But they'll go everywhere. Any landlord, any say, Realtor in the City of Lowell that has a multiple dwelling will have an Asian as a customer for it. And that's every, in every part of the city. I don't think there's one part of the city that they're not in. They're already in the suburbs. There are some in Billerica. There are some in Dracut. There's some in Tewksbury, and Wilmington. Of course we've, now they're headed up towards the Nashua area. They've expanded into Nashua. But I don't think there's a deliberate attempt to keep them out. I think if a person has a piece of property in Lowell and he's selling it for good money, and a Cambodian comes up and has got the money, they'll sell it. And they're doing it. And they don't care what the uh, what the neighbors think.

D: What about the, what role do the Hispanics play in all of this?

L: Hispanics? Ah, I think they're very jealous. They've been here twenty years and I don't see them really moving at all. I think it's because they don't have a leader in the Hispanic Community. The Hispanic Community is fragmented with leaders. They have small groups of people in a couple of agencies, but they need a strong male figure as a role model for their community. That is a male oriented society, and I don't see a strong male figure in that community. I see two of the agencies in the city with women heading the agencies. And I don't think they have the clout in their own community. And I think that's what's needed. Ah, to get

them moving. There are a lot of Hispanics who are working, holding good jobs in the city, but they need to do some more work, some work on their own community. Ah, I know this year was the first time we had the Latin American Festival. So the Latin Americans in the city are starting to move. The man in charge form uh, Mario Espinosa. Ah, I think he'll push the Latin Americans, but I wish the Puerto Ricans would do the same thing. I just don't see that community getting together. It's a shame. Ah, because there's a potential there for them. There are all sorts of programs from the city for them. And I don't see them taking advantage of them. That's their fault. You know, they should do more for their own people. Instead of going on screaming and hollering at City Hall for doing ah, about things that they feel slighted over. Ah, they ought to think, really start moving on their own. They can, they can do it. If you've got several thousand people, I think if you had somebody to get in the forefront of it and encourage their own people. I don't see that in this city. Other groups have gone on. The Hispanic and the Portuguese came into this city about the same time back in the seventies, and the sixties. Portuguese are by far way ahead of the Hispanics, yet but they both had a unclear problem. But the Portuguese have, through hard work, have established their own community. They have a strong community.

D: The Portuguese had a community there already, didn't they?

L: Not a large one. A very small one. Ah, it wasn't the size it is today. We've got about twelve thousand in the city right now. Yeah, but there was a small Portuguese Community, but we've always had a small Spanish Community too. Back in the ah, in the sixties we had a small Cuban Comm, ah, Community here. We don't have a comm, a Cuban Community any more. They've all gone to Florida. Ah, they went back when the, the word was out about the Bay Of Pigs, and that they're all going back to Havana. They all, like over night they all took off and headed, headed south. But we've always had a Hispanic Community. Ah, but they really haven't gone anywhere. Mostly their own fault I'd say. Cause I know individual people who have gone on and done very well in this community. Ah, but on the whole I don't think the whole community has moved. Of course it's a community that's in flux too. Ah, it's very difficult to hold a job in the City of Lowell and then go back to Puerto Rico for two months every year. You know, they're traveling back and forth between Lowell and Puerto Rico a couple of times a year. No employer is going to keep you if you're going to spend two months of the year in Puerto Rico. And you've probably heard about this, these people traveling back and forth. Ah, they do that a lot. Ah, and that's, I think part of the problem. Ah, the people that I know that work 52 weeks of the year, or possibly 50 weeks with two weeks vacation, ah, those are the people who don't go back to Puerto Rico. And they stay, and they work. They're buying houses. I know a few people that, that are part of the community. But they are not really part of the Hispanic Community. They are part of the Anglo Community really. They, they just put themselves into the mainstream on their own. Mostly through hard work. Back twenty years ago we had a case worker at the International Institute called Lucy Rivera, and she did an interview in the paper. And she said the trouble with, the one way to solve the Puerto Rican problem in the City of Lowell was for the Puerto Ricans to go to work like she did, and her husband, and her father, and her father-in law, and everybody. And ah, her name was mud in that community for a long time for the things she said. But ah, she was right, because at that time we had five Hispanic Agencies in the City of Lowell all going their own separate direction. Now we're down to two. Got any more questions? [laughs]

D: Got any more questions?

M: That's a lot to think about. [Everyone laughs together.]

L: Well one of the things that's going on now is we're trying to put the Portuguese Communities, to solidify them. You didn't know about this one.

D: I don't know!

L: [Laughs] You didn't know about this one.

D: I see you're always being [unclear].

M: Are they Madeira, Azorian, or what?

L: Mostly from the Islands.

M: Islands, Azores?

L: Yeah. Mostly from the Azores.

M: You don't have Cape Verdians here at all, do you?

L: No. No. They're down your way.

M: Yeah, I know.

L: [laughs]

D: Well what is it exactly?

L: We've had two meetings already. Third one coming up this month. We have Saint Anthony's Church. We have two social clubs, Holy Ghost Society, and a small group of the Portuguese business men got together, with myself included. And we're going to try to form a Coalition of all of the Portuguese Organizations. They feel like they were left on the Central Enrollment. All the newspapers talked about was the Hispanic and Asian, but the Portuguese kids are being bused all over the city with no complaints from the Portuguese parents. But they thought they should have been included as part of it. They have nobody, after being in the city twenty years they have no voice at City Hall. What they want to do is in several areas they want to start voter registration. Encourage their people to register and vote. Ah, they want a say so at City Hall. They want to encourage people to get working for different candidates. Ah, Human Service area, they want address the needs of their own community more. Give some more help to those economically disadvantage in their own community. Ah, there is still a lot of need for E.S.L. Programs, Literacy Programs in the Portuguese Community. Ah, they want to encourage the Portuguese business men to join the Chamber of Commerce. There are no Portuguese

Businesses on the Chamber of Commerce. Um, basically they want to get that community moving. Get them main-streamed into, into the workings of the City government. So we're going to be meeting this week to go over the letter which is going to be sent out to the different organizations. And the city has encouraged me to provide that access to City Hall. That's part of Gate Ways Program, is to provide access to City Hall. And they have encouraged me to encourage them to put it together, and to form a Portuguese Community Block Coalition. They haven't decided on a name for it yet, but to get involved more in the community end of things. They've already established themselves as part of the community. But now they want a say so at City Hall. There is nobody at any ah, department level at City Hall ah, that is Portuguese. I think there's somebody on the Liquor Commission that is Portuguese. But that's the only one at City Hall. They want to get, they want to be part of the city. They want to be a voice in the city. And ah, they want to encourage the Portuguese to be part of it. They get more community oriented. And that's going to take a lot of education, because they stayed in the Back Central Street area. They do their Portuguese thing and that's it. But now they want to get out in the Community. And I'm talking about a group of people who are in their, in their thirties. These are people who um, still have a Portuguese accent, but they're more American oriented than they are Portuguese.

D: I, but I did have one last question. Um, now do you have, you have a very real role here as Administrator of the Gate Ways City Program here, but this is something that's, that you've had a personal involvement in for a long time. And so you could speak to your role as the Administrator of Gateway Cities, but if you could you know, step back a little bit from that and just look at you yourself as an individual, and your activities over the last twenties years, how do you see yourself? What do you, what do you see as your own personal role here in this city?

L: I really never thought about it. You know I, somebody asked me what I was. And I said I was a community activist, and I was an ethnic coordinator, but you know, I like the city. I think it's a fun city. And I like all the ethnic events. And I like meeting all of the different people. I think it's, it's a lot more fun than eating plain white bread. You know you through in a little rye, a little pumpernickel, and it adds a little difference, you know. And you've got the ability to go anywhere in the city, to any function run by any organization, and have friends there. I think it would be very boring if all your friends were like you. Really, I really do. [laugh]. Ah, I think that's why everybody has different faces. But I think nothing could be more boring than to sit down with a bunch of people who thought exactly like you twenty-four hours a day, and whose customs were just like yours. I can't see it. I could, I can't see the Irish only staying with Irish, or the French only staying with French. I think it's more fun if you swap things around. Yeah, I know it. It just adds a little bit more to your life I think.

D: Where do you get that from?

L: I get it from nobody. I got it inversely from my father. My father was old Irish. He had names for everybody. There was no Italians, they were Dagos. The Spanish were Spics. Jews were Kikes. He had a name for everybody. And he told us, my four brothers and I, "I don't care who you marry as long as they're Irish." And when I was seventeen I figured there had to be a little more to life than that. So I ran away from home and joined the Navy and did some traveling. And ah, traveled to Europe several times all over the ah, Mediterranean, all over the

United States. And I found out that you know, it's a lot more fun. Ah, you get to know other people. And my father could never understand this. And he used to have distinctions of his own. I invited him to an Ethnic Fair here in Lowell one time. He come up to me and he told me he met an Israeli Air Force Captain. He was really thrilled about it. And I said, "how did you meet him?" He said, "I was dancing with this woman and she introduced me." This woman was probably one of the biggest Jewish Activist in the City of Lowell, but he had a distinction between Jewish and Israeli in his mind. If he'd known that the women he was dancing with was, we called her "Super Jew" [laugh] ah, and that the Israeli Air Force Captain that she introduced him to was her cousin, I think he would have had a heart attack [laugh]. But I think ah, that's basically the reason. And ah, it's had a few surprises. Ah, my father would probably make Archie Bunker be able to look like a liberal. And we told him this, you know. He knew it. Ah, he could never understand us involved with other people.

M: It's interesting though that when the label's not there he was able to interact very well.

L: And it's funny because (--)

M: The label didn't get in the way. [Laugh]

L: He had, he had helpers that were Polish. And he had helpers, he was an electrician, he had helpers who were Black. But he qualified. He'd say, "well he's not bad for a Black guy." [Unclear] he didn't use Black guy, he'd used the euphemism, you know. He'd say, "he's not bad for a Nigger." You know? But he had the distinction, you know, he had to throw that in all the time. And ah, my brothers and I have all gone the other way, you know. We, none of us have married Irish girls though. You know, [laughs], which is quite a shock. And then he died last year, about a year and a half ago. And I got a call from the Cambodian Temple asking for permission to come to his wake. And ah, the two Monks came and brought all the leaders of the Cambodian Community. And ah, if my father had been able to open up his eyes and see two Buddhist Monks and the Cambodians standing in a circle around his casket praying, he would have died of a heart attack then [laugh]. But it was quite a sight, and his brothers were just amazed, because they knew my fathers feelings about other people. Yet ah, it didn't make any difference to those people, because of course they didn't know him. But ah, it was quite a sight [laugh]. But it's like I said. It's probably the reverse. You know, I just heard my father talking about it, and I decided there had to be something good about other people. And ah, fortunately I've got a wife whose involved too. So that's helped.

D: Well [comment unclear].

M: No, we've covered a lot of ground I think.

L: Yeah. You've just got to talk to the other Cambodians in the community. In fact you ought to see Narin down here and ask when you could do an interview. He's right down the hall.

M: Yeah, okay.

L: Yeah.

END OF TAPE